

Anglo-Japanese Friendships : Yashiro Yukio,
Laurence Binyon and Arthur Waley

John Trevor Hatcher

福岡大学人文論叢
第23巻第4号抜刷
平成4年3月発行

Anglo-Japanese Friendships : Yashiro Yukio, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Waley

John Trevor Hatcher

The much-heralded “internationalization” engaging the energies of contemporary Japan is the latest phase in a process which had been under way long before Commodore Perry’s Black Ships steamed into Edo Bay in 1853. As played out on the fraught, garishly lit political stage, relations between Japan and the rest of the world have spanned the full range of human emotion, from love to loathing, from comedy to darkest tragedy, but it is at the local level of personal friendships that the most significant cross-cultural confrontations have occurred. While statesmen talk past one another in mutually incomprehensible dialects of *politicospeak*, friends sharing the more genuinely international *lingua franca* of art, music and literature have forged profounder understandings and misunderstandings. This paper explores a nexus of Anglo-Japanese friendships, those between the eminent Japanese art historian Yashiro Yukio (1890-1975) and his oldest and closest friends in England, the poet and art scholar Laurence Binyon (1869-1943) and the translator Arthur Waley (1889-1966).

It was perhaps no coincidence that when Yashiro Yukio was born in November 1890 it was, like another famous East-West mediator, Okakura

Tenshin, in Yokohama. Yokohama had been a seaside village until 1859 when it was chosen as one of the five ports designated for foreign trade under the commercial treaties the Tokugawa government had reluctantly concluded with the United States, Britain, Holland, Russia and France the year before. With a speed and efficiency that Westerners would later recognise as typically Japanese, Yokohama had been converted into a modern trading port and, with its nearness to Edo (Tokyo), had swiftly established itself as the foremost treaty port, handling the bulk of imports and exports. (In these palmy days for the Western economic powers, the former far outran the latter.) Yashiro's father came from an old samurai family which lost its samurai status after the Meiji Restoration. He had been forced to go into trade, but, proving as poor a merchant as he was a reluctant one, a shop specializing in Shizuokan lacquerware failed. He found his niche in the new Japan, however, when he became the manager of a trading house, where his command of English brought success in business with foreign merchants. Thus, even by the standards of the Yokohama of the 1890s, his son was brought up in a highly cosmopolitan environment since the family house, like Okakura's, lay between the foreign quarter and the rest of the town. From earliest boyhood, foreign traders, sailors, diplomats and their families and foreign ships, architecture, arts, crafts and fashions were for Yashiro daily realities, not the exotic curiosities they were for daytrippers from Tokyo. Studying English with foreign teachers from an early age, his interest ran deeper than merely acquiring the language. He relates in his autobiography how even as a high school pupil he took a keen interest in international relations. When problems arose over restrictions on Japanese immigrants to the

USA, for example, he wrote to the commander of an American battleship then in port, suggesting that the problem was exacerbated by inadequate understanding between Americans and Japanese, and offered his own friendship as a small step on the road to mutual understanding. It was a message Yashiro would preach, and exemplify, throughout his life. He was fortunate in his choice of correspondent, for the result was a long friendship with Commander McCurry of the *USS California* who, as an admirer of George Bernard Shaw, encouraged Yashiro's interest in English literature and sent him copies of the *Saturday Evening Post* every week.¹⁾

Yashiro duly studied English literature at Tokyo Imperial University, but he was even more interested in art. He studied Western painting at evening school and, since oils were too expensive, took up Western-style watercolour painting. In his second year he submitted a watercolour to the Bunten, a prestigious exhibition organized annually by the Ministry of Education and regarded as the gateway to becoming a professional artist. It was accepted, exhibited and bought by a Tokyo businessman, the first of several paintings Yashiro sold during his student days. With part of the money he bought a painting by the London-based American Impressionist James McNeil Whistler. As well as painting and his literary studies, he found time to translate part of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, a work he deeply admired, representing as it did the marriage of art and literature to which he himself aspired. His graduation thesis, "The Emotional Principles of Art", was acclaimed the best that year and he graduated in 1915 with the Emperor's Prize.

Yashiro's career as an art historian began when he was appointed as a

lecture at the Tokyo School of Art (Tokyo Bijutsu Gakko) in Ueno Park, where Okakura had been a flamboyant, controversial principal from 1890 to 1898. Seeing himself as an artist as much as a scholar, Yashiro was happy working here among practising artists and art students, preferring them to the bickering academic aestheticians at Tokyo Imperial University. His ambition, however, was to study Western art at first hand, and in 1921 he sailed for Britain, the first step on an art pilgrimage around Europe.

The first person Yashiro went to see in London was Laurence Binyon, head of the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. Binyon was well known for his hospitality to Japanese visitors, who had been coming with increasing frequency since the late 1890s. He numbered among his Japanese friends poets like Noguchi Yone, artists like Shimomura Kanzan and scholars like Taki Seiichi. For a young Japanese scholar seeking advice, help and friendship, Binyon was patently the man to know, but Yashiro had other reasons too, being drawn as much by Binyon's literary as by his scholarly reputation. Known as the "scholar-poet of the British Museum", Binyon was that rarest of hybrids, a genuine artist and scholar. Having won the Newdigate prize at Oxford, like his mentor Matthew Arnold before him, he had made his mark in the London literary world of the 1890s as an impressionist poet of urban life. By the turn of the century he was being hailed as one of the "apostles" of a vital post-*fin-de-siècle* "new age of poetry,"²⁾ and was seen by many as the closest rival to W. B. Yeats. This early promise was unfulfilled, mostly through sheer lack of genius but certainly not helped by money problems which constrained him to supplement his Museum

income with potboiling journalism in order to maintain his young family, leaving little time for literature. Nevertheless, he remained a serious and ambitious poet. Like Yeats, he was also fascinated by the theatre and wrote several ambitious verse dramas, one of which, *Attila*, had been impressively staged at His Majesty's Theatre in 1909.

By 1921, however, he was known for one poem, by now one of the most famous poems in the language, his Great War elegy "For the Fallen". Published in the *Times* within weeks of the outbreak of war, "For the Fallen" had grown in stature as its prophetic sense of grief increasingly spoke to the mood of the British nation as this most obscene of all wars dragged on, a black hole steadily devouring an entire European generation, something Binyon saw at first hand as a volunteer Red Cross orderly and ambulancier in France.

Binyon's reputation as an art scholar had grown in step with his reputation as a poet and dramatist. His lifelong admiration for Japanese culture began in 1893 when, as a 23-year-old classicist just up from Oxford University, he was introduced to Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints by one of his many artist friends. Joining the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum two years later, he embarked on an intensive study of Japanese art. The first decade of the century also saw a deepening and broadening of his sympathy with and knowledge of all forms of Oriental art, including Chinese, Indian and Persian art. His deepest sympathies, as both poet and scholar, were engaged by the ink paintings in the great classical tradition of China and Japan, a tradition which, for him, culminated in the ink landscapes of Sung dynasty China and Ashikaga Japan. Interpreted as a deeply spiritual and ecologically

sensitive tradition, he saw this art as holding profound significance for the West at the beginning of the twentieth century. With serious study of Oriental art in the West still in its infancy, he emerged as one of the true pioneers. His 1908 *Painting in the Far East* was the first book in any European language to discuss the whole range of Oriental painting, while *The Flight of the Dragon* (1911) was a widely read and influential study of Chinese aesthetics. These and other books introduced the treasures of Japanese and Chinese art to a wider public in Britain and the United States, attacked ingrained eurocentric prejudices and helped lay the foundation for the scholarly study of Oriental art in the West.

By 1912, largely through Binyon's drive and ingenuity, the Museum had acquired a collection of Far Eastern art to rival any public collection in Europe. Binyon's dream of an independent department of Oriental art would not be realized for several decades, but in early 1913 he helped lay the foundations for the present day Department of Oriental Antiquities by persuading the Director and Trustees to establish a small, semi-autonomous Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings within the Department of Prints and Drawings. In late 1913 the Department had moved from the old White Wing to roomier and more comfortable quarters in the newly built Edward VII Galleries. Binyon's Sub-Department moved with it and it was here, eight years later, that Yashiro first met him.

Binyon was fifty two years old, a grave faced, fatherly figure. Yashiro found him "an English gentleman in the prime of life" who "expressed in his every gesture the kindness and gentility of his heart". Both men had a natural talent for friendship and it is hardly surprising that Yashiro

“immediately felt a sense of friendship and warmth toward him³⁾. Binyon not only welcomed him to the Print Room but also into his own home, which could hardly have been closer, being within the Museum itself. Since August 1919 Binyon and his family had lived in one of the houses in the East Wing of the Museum overlooking Montague Street, making him really “Binyon of Bloomsbury, “as *Punch* dubbed him in a 1923 cartoon.⁴⁾ The Museum was in every sense the centre of his world. Already a little homesick perhaps, Yashiro fell gratefully into the embrace of the Binyon family, basking in the attentions of the Binyons’ three schoolgirl daughters, the fourteen-year-old twins Margaret and Helen and nine-year-old Nicolette, whom he remembered meeting first in her Girl Guide uniform. In this hospitable home he met many writers and artists of Binyon’s generation, including the poet Walter de la Mare and the artist Charles Ricketts, who had designed the sets and costumes for Binyon’s *Attila*.

Binyon found Yashiro a delightful companion, open-eyed and sensitive to beauty in life and art. In Binyon Yashiro found both a sympathetic friend and a model, a scholar-artist who was a respected poet while, in his modest way, doing for Japanese art what Yashiro’s beloved Ruskin had done for Turner in *Modern Painters*. Yashiro called him his English *sensei*, writing to him the following year : “It seems that I am walking in the same road, following you I look up to you as my predecessor, teacher.”⁵⁾ The older man’s influence pervades Yashiro’s early letters. In one he describes himself as “not a historian, but a humble disciple of the Beautiful,” and that is how twenty years later he would describe Binyon himself, as a *bi-no-shito*, a dedicated apostle or missionary of beauty.⁶⁾ “In my London days I felt my tastes were changing, ” he writes in another. “I

felt more and more attraction to poetry - that is, from the plastic & concrete art I was or am still approaching to the more absolute and spiritual art.”⁷⁾ It is no coincidence that this more “spiritual” aesthetic led him to adopt two of Binyon’s artistic heroes, Sandro Botticelli and the English visionary poet-painter William Blake, on both of whom Binyon had published books.

On his first visit to the Museum, Binyon took him into the Students Room and introduced him to his assistant, a silent, eagle-faced young man seated at the supervisor’s high desk. Looking back on the event almost fifty years later, Yashiro recalled:

When I was introduced to him he didn’t even smile. Moreover, he spoke in a low voice and, when speaking, seemed to suck in his breath. Having only just arrived in England, I at first found it very hard to catch what he was trying to say.⁸⁾

This was Arthur Waley. The name meant nothing to Yashiro, but within a few short years it would be instantly recognizable to anyone with even a passing interest in Japanese culture. He had been at the Museum for eight years, having arrived in the Department of Prints and Drawings in June 1913 as a 24-year-old ex-Cambridge man named Arthur Schloss. On the outbreak of the Great War little over a year later, he had dropped the Germanic Schloss for his mother’s maiden name, Waley. As he later told the story, he had at first worked under Campbell Dodgson, Keeper of the Department and an expert on German woodcuts and engravings, who had saddled him with the tediously laborious task of counting and sorting a

newly acquired batch of German bookplates. It was to escape this drudgery, rather than any interest in Oriental art, that he applied to join Binyon's Sub-Department when it was established soon afterwards.⁹⁾ The British Museum records tell a different story, for, as Basil Gray has shown, Waley was appointed directly to the Sub-Department as Binyon's assistant in June 1913.¹⁰⁾ Nevertheless, Waley's characteristically wry account neatly allegorizes his rejection of the Museum pedantry he saw embodied in Dodgson in favour of the more congenial environment created by the literary, humane and anything but pedantic Binyon.

It is not my intention to examine here the relationship between Binyon and Waley, a complex subject which I will explore in a future essay. Suffice it to say here that the twenty year age gap between the two men placed them not only in different generations but in perhaps the two most radically opposed generations in English literary history. While Binyon was self-confessedly a late Victorian, a traditional poet working in a near-exhausted Romantic mode, Waley belonged to the modernist generation not only by age but by temperament, philosophy and - as a friend of T. S. Eliot, the Sitwells and several Bloomsbury insiders - by friendship. As a poet, Binyon stood for everything Waley saw as defunctly nineteenth century, part of the cluttered Victorian cultural furniture that his generation would sweep away. Personally, however, they seem to have got on pretty well. Waley later recalled that throughout the eighteen years he worked alongside Binyon he found him "an ideal friend and chief". They were never close friends, but then Waley had few close friends. Taciturn, fastidious, deeply serious, he seemed to many a cold, even hostile figure. Unable to abide small talk, once a conversation ceased

to interest him he was infamous for lapsing into a introspective, other-worldly silence that unnerved even the most battle - hardened Bloomsbury raconteurs.

Working alongside Binyon in the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings, Waley had carved out a unique niche for himself. Like Binyon, he had studied classics at university. His application form claimed that he could also read French, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch and Portuguese, as well as some Hebrew and Sanskrit,¹¹ but he had had no previous contact with Far Eastern languages. Being a systematic scholar and finding it difficult to come to grips with Oriental art without some knowledge of Chinese and Japanese, he had begun learning both languages. From the start he was drawn to Chinese poetry, beginning with poems he found inscribed on paintings and later those he unearthed in dustily unread Chinese anthologies on the shelves of the School of Oriental Studies in Finsbury Circus.¹² Medically unfit for military service (he was blind in one eye), he spent the war years quietly working on translations of these poems, which appeared in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, the *New Statesman*, the *Little Review* and *Poetry*. They were collected in *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1918), followed a year later by *More Translations from the Chinese* (1919), books which, with Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (1915), revolutionized the way Chinese poetry was read and evaluated, while at the same time introducing into English poetry a new, distinctive voice which belonged as much to Waley himself as the Chinese poets he was translating.

Yashiro was intrigued and amused by his first awkward encounter with this seemingly introverted scholar, who was only year older than himself.

He was particularly struck by the contrast between Waley and his chief Binyon, Museum colleagues and fellow scholar-poets but “completely different type [s] of Englishman”. While Binyon, sensitive to the presence and needs of others, “expressed in his every gesture the kindness and gentility of his heart”, Waley seemed a coolly aloof young man hedged about with defences. Nevertheless, Yashiro found himself “vaguely fascinated by his eccentricity” and readily accepted when, a few days later, Waley invited him to dinner in his rooms near the Museum. Yashiro was neither the first nor the last dinner guest to be astonished at the frugality of Waley’s repasts. A highly disciplined, naturally ascetic man, he was currently going through a vegetarian phase. For their dinner he boiled corn and other vegetables in a saucepan over the fire in his living room. This was washed down with water and followed by dessert of “a raw apple which we ate unpeeled”. (The fact that the apples were eaten unpeeled, common enough in Britain, shocked Yashiro more than anything else.) “To be frank”, he wrote later, “I felt distinctly taken aback by the simplicity of the meal”. After dinner, however, Waley led him up onto the roof. It was a warm London summer night, still light, and he brought out a piccolo and began playing. Yashiro, who had come 10,000 miles to explore the springs of European culture, was captivated.¹³⁾

Yashiro continued to be fascinated by the “striking contrast between the characters of Binyon and Waley”. Whereas Binyon was “an English gentleman” “surrounded by a lively family in a happy home”, Waley seemed a bohemian living “a lonely bachelor life” in a cramped, monkish flat.¹⁴⁾ “At that time”, he recalled, “I come to the private conclusion that Waley was an extremely interesting and unusual Western hermit.”¹⁵⁾

Although he continued to think of Waley as the “hermit” (*tonseisha*) of the British Museum,¹⁶⁾ on later visits over the next few years he discovered that Waley actually had a wide if sometimes wary circle of London friends, most of them on the fringes of Bloomsbury, some of them - Roger Fry, for example - dead center. Idiosyncratic himself, he attracted, Yashiro felt, “rather original people, among whom there are scholars, painters, poets, dramatists, and those who occupy themselves as both writers and second-hand book shop keepers”. With Waley and his friends he would sometimes eat at an inexpensive Italian restaurant near Soho Square, feeling suitably bohemian dining at a place “where only such people as the men - about - town gathered. In this respect Waley’s society is quite different from that of Binyon, which is aristocratic and homy”¹⁷⁾ (Twenty years earlier the poet Noguchi Yone had felt similarly privileged when Binyon, then still a bachelor and certainly not “aristocratic and homy”, had introduced him to another “bohemian” Soho restaurant, writing to his wife in February 1903 : “I made many a nice young, lovely, kind friend among literary *genius* (attention!) W. B. Yeats, or Lawrence Binyon, Moore and Bridges. They are so good ; they invite me almost everyday. They are jolly companions.” Anxious to reassure her that he had not fallen among decadent Wildean aesthetes, he had added : “Their hairs are not long, I tell you.”)¹⁸⁾

Yashiro soon discovered too that Waley’s was not altogether, or at least not unambiguously, a bachelor’s existence. Admiring English poetry but unable to “feel its inherent music”, he consulted Binyon on where he could study the reading of English poetry. Binyon put him in touch with Beryl de Zoete, who was teaching a Dalcrozean dancing class attended by

his youngest daughter, Nicolette. Yashiro went to her Bloomsbury flat twice a week and listened while she read modern English poems.¹⁹⁾ Dancer, musician, translator, traveller, writer and one of the most remarkable women in London's cultural world, de Zoese also turned out to be Waley's "closest woman friend", as Yashiro delicately (and accurately) put it. They had met in 1918 and, except for her long forays abroad - she would spend her seventieth birthday in India and Ceylon and visit China in her seventy eighth year - they would remain companions until her death in 1962.²⁰⁾ Sharing with both a deep love of music, Yashiro often visited her with Waley to listen to her play Bach on her clavichord.

Waley too was glad to have a close Japanese friend. By Yashiro's arrival in 1921 he was immersed in Japanese culture. After the publication of *More Translations from the Chinese* in 1919, he had switched his attention from Chinese to Japanese literature. He became particularly interested in Nō drama, which had first come to the notice of the London avant garde in 1913-14, when Pound and Yeats worked on the manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa in Stone Cottage in Sussex, a collaboration which inspired Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well*, first performed before an invited audience at Lady Cunard's Cavendish Square house in 1915. He had given occasional advice to Ezra Pound for his adaptations of Fenollosa's translations, published as "*Noh*" or *Accomplishment* in 1916. In 1921, coinciding with Yashiro's arrival, he published his own superb translations in *The Nō Plays of Japan*. His studies in the philosophical background of Chinese and Japanese art, especially Zen Buddhism - explored a year later in his pamphlet *Zen Buddhism and its Relation to Art* (1922) - enabled Waley to enlighten baffled readers by placing Nō in

its Zen context. Though he refrained from questioning his reticent friend about it, Yashiro suspected that he had embarked on an even more ambitious enterprise, a translation of Murasaki Shikibu's massive eleventh-century prose romance *Genji Monogatari*, hitherto unavailable in English except in a poor partial translation by Suematsu Kencho published in 1882. Characteristically, Waley carried a copy of the *Kogetsusho* commentary on *Genji Monogatari* in his pocket, tugging it out to read periodically (often, one imagines, in the middle of conversations). Occasionally he asked Yashiro questions which, being no scholar of classical Japanese, he not surprisingly "sometimes found difficult to answer".²¹⁾

Yashiro belonged to a different generation from his older compatriots Noguchi and Yoshio Markino, who under Whistlerian influence had loved London fogs, the latter complaining in Italy : "Only if Rome had London fogs!"²²⁾ Yashiro found the London climate frankly depressing. In his autobiography he recounts how hearing an old itinerant singer warbling *O sole mio* beneath his window suddenly awoke him to the fact that he had not seen the sun for weeks. Immediately he packed his bags and left, via Paris, for the blue skies of Italy.²³⁾ By early October 1921 he arrived in Florence, armed with Binyon's letters of introduction to Florentine friends like Flavia Farina and her family. He wrote ecstatically to Binyon :

I am the admirer of the Sun Coming to Italy, crossing the Western Alps, I immediately felt the happiness of getting into my element - Italy where the Sun shines all the year round. Well may St. Francis of Assisi praise the glory of the Sun, calling him the symbol of the Most High.²⁴⁾

As a *bi no shito*, he fell in love with the city and settled down to study Renaissance art, especially Botticelli. Binyon sent him a letter of introduction to the American connoisseur Bernard Berenson, the foremost authority on Italian art, who lived in Fiesole. In November 1922 Yashiro wrote to Binyon saying he had decided to embark on a major study of Botticelli in English, aimed at a Western rather than specifically Japanese readership. Not everyone thought this a good idea, as eurocentrism raised its hydra heads in some unlikely places. Berenson was kind to the young scholar, inviting him into his home and allowing him access to his art library, but he advised Yashiro to content himself with a small, modest volume of his personal impressions of Botticelli, as no one would want to read a scholarly book on the artist written by a Japanese.²⁵⁾ A resilient, buoyant character, Yashiro accepted this as a challenge and spent the three years researching and writing *Sandro Botticelli*, which was published by the Medici Society in a magnificently illustrated three-volume set in 1925. In this he had been encouraged by both Binyon and Waley, who were, he wrote in his preface, “the first to know and encourage my ‘Oriental’ enthusiasm for Botticelli”.²⁶⁾ They were right to do so, for it remains one of the most consistently readable, original and insightful studies of the Florentine painter.

While Yashiro was in Florence, the great Kanto earthquake of September 1923 devastated vast tracts of the Greater Tokyo area, including Yokohama. More than 140,000 people died, most of them in fires that swept through the dense neighbourhoods of wooden houses. Yashiro’s family home was destroyed and his father killed, along with many of his friends. In the wake of this tragedy, which “destroyed nearly all that was

dear to me”,²⁷⁾ he returned to Japan to pick up the pieces. Resuming his professorship at the Tokyo School of Art, he continued to work on European art, but also turned his attention increasingly to Japanese art. He lectured abroad and in 1930 he took an exhibition of contemporary Japanese art to Berlin and Budapest.

He returned to London in 1928 and stayed for a while in a flat Waley found for him near the Museum. Waley had been intensely active during the intervening years. His work on Oriental art in the Print Room yielded *An Index of Chinese Artists represented in the Sub - Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (1922) and *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (1923). Yashiro's suspicion that he was engaged on a translation of *Genji Monogatari* was confirmed when the first volume, *The Tale of Genji*, appeared in 1925, the same year as *Botticelli*. Readers were astonished to discover that not only did the world's first novel date back to the early eleventh century but that it had been written in Japan and by a woman. Volume two, *The Sacred Tree*, appeared in 1926 and was followed by *A Wreath of Cloud* (1927), *Blue Trousers* (1928) and *The Lady of the Boat* (1932). With the sixth and final volume, *The Bridge of Dreams* (1933), one of the masterpieces of world literature stood revealed. It was this epic translation more than any other of his works which led Yashiro to the conclusion, surely a correct one, that Waley was “an extremely gifted original writer”, one who possessed a “rare combination of profound scholarship and creative originality”.²⁸⁾

Binyon had been equally active. Since first meeting Yashiro in 1921 Binyon had published among others books on Persian and Mughal art, the classic handbook *Japanese Colour Prints* (1923), a new, revised edition of

Painting in the Far East (1923), a book-length ode entitled *The Sirens* (1924 - 5), *The Followers of William Blake* (1925), and was just completing a massive new ode, *The Idols* (1928). The year before, while Yashiro was preparing a second edition of *Botticelli*, Binyon had made for him new verse translations of passages from Dante to replace the prose translations used in the first edition. Neither man knew it yet, but this was one of the first steps on the path that would lead Binyon to complete a terza rima translation of the entire *Divina Commedia*.

By now Yashiro knew Binyon and Waley's London, especially Bloomsbury and Soho, almost as well as they did themselves, whereas they knew Japan only through paintings and books. Their attitude to this was strikingly and characteristically different. Waley had no interest whatever in going to either Japan or China. His Japan was the Heian court of tenth-century Kyoto, indeed, it could be argued, a peculiarly Waleyan fictional world compounded of Murasaki, Proust and Bloomsbury - in either case, certainly not the urban sprawl of modern industrialized Japan. He resisted all efforts, including several by Yashiro, to lure him to Japan. (His only excursion east of Europe, and that only across the width of the Bosphorous, was an 1927 trip to Istanbul with the indefatigable Beryl de Zoete.) Binyon, by contrast, had been longing to travel to the East since the late 1890s. Museums in Europe and the U. S. A. had long been sending their key staff on missions to the East, but the British Museum lagged behind. Rightly feeling that lack of first-hand experience in Asia hampered his studies of Oriental art, Binyon several times made detailed plans for a Museum "mission to the East" but on each occasion the Treasury refused to finance the mission. In 1923 Taki Seiichi, Dean of

the Faculty of Letters of Tokyo Imperial University, invited him to follow in Lafcadio Hearn's footsteps as Professor of English Literature at Tokyo University, but for Museum, family and other reasons Binyon could not accept, and the post went instead to Edmund Blunden. Yashiro was, however, determined to bring Binyon to Japan. In 1928, when Binyon was invited to give a series of lectures at Tokyo Imperial University, Yashiro helped form a Binyon Reception Committee to finance and coordinate his visit, comprised of Tokyo University academics and powerful political figures like Count Makino Nobuaki, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, Baron Okura Kishichiro and Baron Dan Takuma, head of the massive Mitsui corporation.²⁹⁾

It was a good deal due to Yashiro's efforts that on his sixtieth birthday, 10 August 1929, Binyon sailed out of Southampton on a six-month journey that took him and wife to China, Korea and Indochina as well as Japan. When they arrived at Yokohama in torrential early autumn rains in the early hours of 9 September, Yashiro was there to meet them, alongside the Reception Committee, British officials and the Japanese press. In Japan Binyon played a role for which the last thirty years had uniquely fitted him, that of cultural ambassador. Having spent thirty years introducing Japanese art to the British, he now came to introduce British art to the Japanese with his lecture series *Landscape in English Art and Poetry* and an exhibition of British watercolours of Yashiro's Institute of Art Research in Ueno Park. Yashiro was his companion and guide on many of his almost daily visits to Japanese and Chinese art collections in Tokyo, not only those of the Imperial Museum and other institutions but the wonderful private collections of men like Marquis

Kuroda, Baron Masuda, Mr Nezu, Baron Iwasaki, Viscount Matsudaira and Marquis Hosokawa, and those of his own sponsors, the Barons Dan, Mitsui and Okura. Yashiro watched as Binyon at last came face to face with the handscrolls, album leaves and hanging scrolls that had changed his life when he had discovered them decades earlier in the pages of the Japanese journal the *Kokka*. He found himself "greatly touched by the sight of Binyon's joy at seeing, for the first time, the originals of those things he had admired for so long, a joy which was really that of meeting old familiar friend [sic]".³⁰⁾

By the time Yashiro next visited London in 1933 the old Binyon-Waley partnership at the British Museum was over. Binyon had returned home from the Far East in January 1930 to find that Waley had retired at the end of 1929, officially on grounds of ill health but in reality to devote himself to writing and translation. Yashiro found Waley mellowed, "growing more gentle as time goes on". Ensclosed in a small room on the top floor of the Russell Hotel, he was deep in a translation of the Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu, still playing the hermit role Yashiro so much enjoyed: "His room was high up, one might say near heaven, and from the window we had a view of the city of London. In fact he was sitting in this room like the attic philosopher."³¹⁾ Binyon too had just retired in September 1933, having stayed on beyond his long-planned retirement date in order to give Waley's successor time to find his feet. This was the 25-year-old Basil Gray, destined to be one of the outstanding Oriental art scholars of his generation, who would marry Nicolette Binyon in July 1933 and himself become a close friend of Yashiro's. Binyon spent the first year of his "retirement" at Harvard University as Charles Eliot Norton

Professor of Poetry for 1933-4, delivering a series of lectures which appeared in 1935 as *The Spirit of Man in Asian Art*.

Yashiro himself had been lecturing at Harvard until shortly before Binyon arrived, but the two men did manage to meet up again in 1935, when Yashiro was among a host of scholars and art lovers from around the globe who came to London for the great International Exhibition of Chinese Art held at the Royal Academy from November 1935 to March 1936. This was the last major Oriental art project with which Binyon was involved. As a member of the Executive Committee, he had spent most of the summer, autumn and winter writing articles and the catalogue introduction, giving talks, sitting on committees and finally hanging by far the richest collection of Chinese paintings ever seen in England. While in London, where he delivered a series of lectures on Chinese painting at the Courtauld Institute, Yashiro met both Waley and Binyon, but he knew that by now Binyon's real life lay elsewhere, in an old farmhouse on the Berkshire Downs, high above the Thames villages of Streatley and Goring south of Oxford. Here, when he was not being dragged away to London, Binyon continued to work on his translation of the *Commedia*, encouraged and aided by Ezra Pound, and produced probably the finest poetry of his career. "So we have got old, are we not, my dear Lorenzo?" Yashiro had written to him in 1933. "You say you are retiring to country life & to devote yourself to poetry! How nice! there you would be in your element! I must come one day to see you in your country resort."³² Now he made the promised trip to Berkshire "in order to express my love and respect to him for 20 years of friendship". Seeing him here working in his orchard and garden, Yashiro felt that Binyon had come home, being, as he

put it, “that type of British poet who loves nature and the country”. He later recalled :

Here he lives a very different life from that of the cultural city atmosphere of the official residence at the British Museum. When I arrived he came out to meet me dressed as the ordinary farmer of the district which gave me the impression of a good - natured old man of the country. By way of greeting he said, “I have been working in the orchard.”

His home is a very old house on a hill In my muddy shoes I stepped into the hall where a fire burned brightly in the big fireplace. As I entered a little dog appeared, which Binyon patted and called “Genji.” While it was almost funny, at the same time it impressed me deeply to find here in the country-side of England where there was no shadow of the East a dirty little dog named after a masterpiece of Japanese literature. Here indeed was proof of Binyon’s love for Japan. “Genji” ran about the room unconscious of the honour of possessing such a classical name.³³⁾

It was the last time Yashiro and Binyon met. In the summer of 1940, while France fell, Britain steeled itself for a German invasion and Japan prepared to sign a treaty in Berlin with the Axis powers, Yashiro thought back to more peaceful times when he and Binyon had conversed together about the brotherhood of man and the humanizing power of art. In an essay his old friend in the *Bulletin of Eastern Art*, he imagined him “surrounded by the trees, the birds, and the flowers that he loves” and felt sure that he would live a long life.³⁴⁾ In fact, after a brief illness Binyon

died suddenly in March 1943, aged seventy three. Britain and Japan were at war, something neither man had imagined he would live to see.

Yashiro continued as Professor the History of Art at the Tokyo School of Art and Director of the Institute of Art Research until 1942. From 1940 to 1944 he made several field trips to China, as well as lecturing at universities in Peking and Nanking. He had kept in touch with Waley until the outbreak of the Pacific War. Waley had returned to his first love, Chinese literature and philosophy, with the publication of *The Way and its Power : A Study of the Tao Tê Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought* (1934), *The Book of Songs* (1937) and *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (1939). Ironically, in the exigencies of war the scholar who had resolutely refused to visit modern Japan for fear of contaminating his literary vision of ancient Japan found himself working as a Japanese censor for the Ministry of Information. He wryly wrote Yashiro that at least this gave him an opportunity to improve his execrable modern Japanese, and in response to his request for modern literature Yashiro sent him novels by Tanizaki Junichiro and Akutagawa Ryunosuke.³⁵⁾ In his spare hours Waley completed what must rank alongside *The Tale of Genji* as his greatest achievement, a vivid translation of Wu Ch'êng-ên's rollicking sixteenth-century prose romance recounting Tripitaka's journey to India, published in 1942 as *Monkey*.

After the war Yashiro resumed his natural role as an international scholar, lecturing widely in Britain, Italy and the United States and accompanying exhibitions of Japanese art as a cultural envoy of the Japanese government. He published books and articles on Japanese, Chinese and occasionally European art, and continued to be involved with

the Institute of Art Research and the Commission for the Protection of Cultural Properties. In 1960 he saw the fulfilment of a dream with the opening of the Yamato Bunkakan in Nara, a splendid museum of Japanese art which Yashiro had worked towards for twenty years and of which he became the first director. In 1963 he was elected to the Japan Art Academy, while in 1965 the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C. awarded him its Charles Lang Freer Medal for his services to Japanese art. In his speech at the award ceremony, the then Director of the Freer Gallery of Art, John A. Pope, described him accurately as "one of the few 'universal art historians' of our time".³⁶⁾

On visits to London during these years, Yashiro met Waley, who was similarly being heaped with honours, including the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 1953. Yashiro was, however, to outlive him by eleven years (he lived until eighty four, dying in Kanagawa in 1975). Waley's death in 1966 moved him to reminisce in the *Japan Quarterly* about his "oldest and closest overseas", "a friend, toward whom I felt no reserve whatever".³⁷⁾ In it he went back over much the same ground he had covered in Japanese five year earlier in *Nihon bijutsu no onjintachi* (1961), a collection of essays about foreign friends of Japanese art, including Fenollosa, Freer, Tagore, Langdon Warner and George Sansom. Here he recalled his long friendship with Binyon and Waley, celebrated their achievements as champions and interpreters of Japanese culture, and defended them against the inevitable onslaught of a new generation of scholars. He was in a unique position to do so and his evaluations, positive and negative, still count. The essence of both men he diagnosed as what he described in Waley's case as an "extreme sensitivity to beauty".³⁸⁾ In

his drier Cambridge/Bloomsbury moods, Waley would have rejected this as too sentimentally nineteenth century, but it was true of him and it was true also of Binyon and Yashiro himself. It was what made and kept them friends, their different but complementary ways of being *bi-no-shito*.

Notes

1) Yashiro, *Watashi no bijutsu henreki* (Tokyo : Iwanami Shoten, 1972) 10-11. For Yashiro's Yokohama childhood, see pp. 2-6.

2) R. A. Streatfeild, "Two Poets of the New Century", *Monthly Review* 2 (March 1901) : 94.

3) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley", *Japan Quarterly* 14 (1967) : 366.

4) "Curiosities of Literature". *Punch* 14 Nov. 1923 : 464.

5) Letter, 29 Nov. [1922] . This and other unpublished letters quoted in this paper were formerly in the possession of Binyon's daughter, Mrs Nicolette Gray, but have since been deposited on loan in the Department of Western manuscripts at the British Library. Yashiro's letters are quoted by kind permission of his daughter - in - law, Mrs Yashiro Wakaba.

6) Letter to Binyon, 6 Oct. 1921 ; Yashiro, *Nihon bijutsu no onjintachi* (Tokyo : Bungei Shunju Shinsha, 1961) 65.

7) Letter, 27 Aug. 1921, British Library.

8) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 366.

9) Introduction, *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, rev. ed. (Londod : Constable, 1962) 4.

10) Basil Gray, "Arthur Waley at the British Museum", *Madly Singing in the Mountains : As Appreciation and Anthology of Arthur Waley*, ed. Ivan Morris (London : Allen & Unwin, 1970) 37-38.

11) See Gray 39.

12) Waley, *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* 4-5. For the background to this and other aspects of Waley's work up until World War Two, see Ruth Perlmutter, "Arthur Waley and his Place in the Modern Movement between the Two Wars", Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1971 (University Microfilms, 71-26,070).

13) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 366. In an earlier essay ("Arthur Waley", *Bulletin of Eastern Art* (Tokyo) 9 (1940) : 17-19), Yashiro gives the date of this dinner as 1928, rather than 1921. In both essays events which took place over several years are sometimes conflated, making the chronology at times somewhat confusing.

14) "Arthur Waley", *Bulletin of Eastern Art* 9 (1940) : 17.

15) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 366.

16) *Nihon bijutsu no onjintachi* 81-82.

17) "Arthur Waley" 18.

18) 24 Feb. 1903, letter 172, *Yone Noguchi : Collected English Letters*, ed. Ikuko Atsumi (Tokyo : Yone Noguchi Society, 1975) 106.

19) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 366. Yashiro says that de Zoete was teaching Binyon's daughter to play the piano, but this seems to be a memory blip, as Nicolette Gray has confirmed that she attended de Zoete's dance class (personal interview).

20) See Marian Ury, "Some Notes toward a Life of Beryl de Zoete", *Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* 48 (June 1986) : 1-54. As her title suggests, Marian Ury is engaged on a biography of this splendid woman.

21) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 366-67.

22) *A Japanese Artist in London* (London : Chatto & Windus 1910) 189-90.

23) *Watashi no bijutsu henreki* 78.

24) Letter, 6 Oct. 1921, British Library. Yashiro published a collection of his Florence essays under the title *Taiyo o shitaumono* - that is, "A Man Who Yearns for the Sun" - in 1925 (Tokyo : Kaizosha).

25) Yashiro, *Watashi no bijutsu henreki* 101-02.

26) *Sandro Botticelli*, 3 vols. (London : Medici Society, 1925) 1 : xii.

27) *Botticelli xiii*.

- 28) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 365.
- 29) See preface by the Binyon Reception Committee in *Catalogue of the Loan Collection of English Water - Colour Drawings Held at the Institute of Art Research, Ueno, Tokyo, October 10-24th, 1929* (Tokyo : privately printed by Kenkyusha Press for Binyon Reception Committee, [1930]) xi.
- 30) "Lawrence Binyon, " *Bulletin of Eastern Art* (Tokyo) 7-8 (July-Aug. 1940) : 20. For a more detailed description of Binyon's visit to the Far East, see my "Laurence Binyon : A Critical Biography", D. Phil. dissertation, Oxford University, 1991.
- 31) "Arthur Waley" 19.
- 32) Letter, 24 Feb. 1933, British Library.
- 33) "Lawrence Binyon" 19.
- 34) "Lawrence Binyon" 23.
- 35) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 367.
- 36) "The Career of Professor Yukio Yashiro", *Third Presentation of the Charles Lang Freer Medal* (Washington, D. C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1965) 8.
- 37) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 365.
- 38) "Men of Achievement : Arthur Waley" 365.